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RESEARCH INSTITUTES AND THEIR VALUE¹

IN this restless, drifting world in which we now live, even intelligent people are not always appreciative of the fact that many if not most of the great intellectual achievements in various fields have been accomplished only when the thinker has been protected from the interruption and annoyance of passing events and permitted to work out his ideas somewhat apart from the general current of existence. In the Middle Ages, the alchemist, the philosopher or the mathematician retired to a garret or cellar and there achieved his purpose, and even to this day the idea that starvation and a garret are successful stimulants to scientific investigation clings persistently to the popular mind, together with so many of those superstitions by which humanity is still largely guided. Truth is that the thinking man in the middle ages was driven into a garret and often compelled to accept poverty because his thoughts or discoveries had no commercial value or popular interest, and, if published, sometimes led to controversies settled once for all by that unanswerable argument of authority, the fagot and the stake. The example of Servetus must surely have been a severe blow to hasty publication. One of the early masters of medicine, he died a martyr to his printed opinions at the early age of 42, his old friend, John Calvin, seeing to it, it is said, that the fire was well started.

But the time when important extensions of the boundaries of knowledge, especially in science, can be accomplished in garret or cellar with no material except brains, a little sealing wax, some wire and a few pieces of glass,

¹ An address delivered at the opening of the new laboratory building of the Collis P. Huntington Memorial Hospital, Harvard University, May 15, 1922.